

It's Not the Gift, It's the Thought Behind It

By JOHN LEONARD

Foundation money! Encounter magazine! Angry intellectuals! It's the socio-literary late show, a rerun of the anxious 1960's in the disconsolate 1970's—complete with hot and cold running warriors athwart their mimeograph machines.

You will remember that Encounter, the British monthly, was subsidized until 1964 by the Congress for Cultural Freedom—to the tune of \$15,000 a year. In 1966 the Congress for Cultural Freedom was revealed to have been subsidized by our own Central Intelligence Agency. On being horrified by this bad news, people like Stephen Spender and Frank Kermode—who had been categorically denying rumors of such a covert subsidy for years—resigned from Encounter's editorial board. The Congress for Cultural Freedom then reconstituted itself as the International Association for Cultural Freedom and went right on subsidizing a variety of journals in Australia (Quadrant), France (Preuves), Germany (Monat), Great Britain (The China Quarterly, Survey, Minerva), India (Quest), Latin America (Mundo Nuevo, Aportes), Uganda (Transition) and Thailand (Social Science Review).

At just about the time that Encounter stopped getting subsidies from the C.I.A., it started getting them from Cecil King's International Publishing Corporation of London (The Daily Mirror, etc.). Mr. King's group recently allowed its financial backing to lapse, and the magazine has been hard put to meet its publication costs. Who should come to the rescue? The Ford Foundation, that's who. The Ford Foundation has forwarded \$50,000 of "emergency assistance" to Encounter, through what in the 1960's we used to call a "conduit"—in this case, the International Association for Cultural Freedom. Interesting.

Such emergency assistance is considered especially interesting by the editors of and contributors to domestic literary magazines. It is interesting because the Ford Foundation has never given any money to local journals. It is even more interesting because the Ford money has been specifically earmarked to "seek increased circulation in the United States" for Encounter. The editors of The Massachusetts Review (Jules Chametzky), The Sewanee Review (Andrew Lytle), The

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Hudson Review (Frederick Morgan), The Partisan Review (William Phillips) and Tri-Quarterly (Charles Newman) have protested: "This grant, by an organization that on many previous occasions has claimed a lack of funds for the support of American literary magazines, is grossly insulting to American editors and writers. It is also damaging to American literary magazines in putting them at a competitive disadvantage. . . . We are made uneasy, as well, by the political implications of this effort to promote and expand Encounter's influence in this country." Jules Feiffer, Susan Sontag, Frank Kermode (!), Robert Brustein, Norman Mailer and William Styron are among the writers who have joined these editors in objection.

In June of this year James Boatwright, speaking for the Co-ordinating Council of Literary Magazines, also objected to the Encounter grant in a letter to the President of the Ford Foundation, McGeorge Bundy. Mr. Boatwright was coolly diplomatic: "Some of our members regard the grant as a scandal." However, "We prefer to place a more positive interpretation upon the grant and believe that it really signifies that the Ford Foundation is now prepared to give support to literary magazines, even American ones." And especially American ones that "do not have the same legacy as Encounter to overcome."

Mr. Bundy, in his reply to Mr. Boatwright, was sophisticated: "There are essentially two parts to your letter—one relating to the view which your members have of Encounter, and the other relating to general support to non-profit literary magazines published in the United States. These are really two subjects, and as it happens they are treated in two different parts of the Ford Foundation." It seems that the grant to Encounter was recommended by the Ford Foundation's professional staff in their office of European and

International Affairs, whereas policies having to do with American literary magazines are determined by Ford's division of the Humanities and the Arts. As it happens, the division of the Humanities and the Arts feels that its money is better spent on direct and indirect grants to poets, novelists and playwrights; on post-doctoral fellowships through the American Council of Learned Societies; and on playwrights' workshops, experimental theaters and full-scale producing companies. Alas, "the Foundation is not currently planning a program in the field of your direct activity."

To be sure, some of the protesting about the Foundation's "emergency assistance" sounds a little too much like local craft unions complaining about low tariffs on digital clock radios from Japan. And the Foundation's division of the Humanities and the Arts may very well be right in thinking that grants to individuals are a more effective way of promoting art than grants to magazines. And Encounter is now and always was an excellent magazine, one of the C.I.A.'s better investments—it has distinguished itself particularly in its emphasis on science.

But it is hard to see why arguments that are compelling in one part of the Ford Foundation are not compelling in another part. If it's all right to subsidize a European magazine, why is it not all right to subsidize an American magazine? Unless the grant to Encounter is considered to be singular, aberrant, exceptional, and if it is to be considered an exception, why? Why, of all the magazines in the world that have never been or are no longer subsidized by the C.I.A., does only Encounter rate \$50,000?

Those editors and writers who are protesting cannot be blamed for suspecting that there is something political about making an exception of Encounter. While Encounter's contributors often disagree, occasionally savagely, with one another, on the whole the magazine has been much more congenial to American foreign policy over the last decade than most American literary magazines have been. Inevitably, conclusions are going to be drawn about the Ford Foundation's understanding of its own role in sanctioning one sort of politicization of literature over another. Those conclusions are not exactly pleasant to behold. ■